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## Note

Contributions in the form of notes or discussions should be sent to Campbell Bonner, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich.

### CICERO'S JOKES ON THE CONSULSHIP OF CANINIUS REBILUS

In the brief discussion of "Cicero as a Wit" in the *Classical Journal* for November, 1907, it was not possible, on account of the limitations of space, to enter into a detailed examination of the wit and humor manifest in the orator's writings, least of all in the *Letters*. Nevertheless, as I was pleasantly reminded by a note from Professor J. C. Kirtland, Jr., in speaking of the jokes on the consulship of Caninius Rebilus recorded by Macrobius, mention might well have been made of the remarks on the same subject in the letter *Ad fam.* vii. 30, which is cited, in this connection, in both the collections of *facete dicta* referred to (*Cic. Op.*, ed. Baiter and Kayser, Vol. II, p. 86; ed. Mueller, Part IV, Vol. III, p. 346). We are not to suppose, however, that either Macrobius or the author of the *Tyranni triginta* in the *Scriptores historiae Augustae* used that letter as a direct source. This will become apparent if we place side by side the three passages containing the jokes.

CICERO *Ad fam.* vii. 30

Ille (Caesar) autem, qui comitiis tributis esset auspatus, centuriata habuit, consulem hora septima renuntiavit, qui usque ad Kalendas Ian. esset, quae erant futurae mane postridie: ita Caninio consule scito neminem prandisse. Nihil tamen eo consule mali factum est; fuit enim mirifica vigilantia, qui suo toto consulatu somnum non viderit. Haec tibi ridicula videntur, non enim ades; quae si videres, lacrimas non teneres.

MACROBIUS *Sat.* ii. 3. 6

Caninius quoque Rebilus, qui uno die, ut iam Servius rettulit, consul fuit, rostra cum ascendisset, pariter honorem iniit consulatus et eieravit; quod Cicero, omni gaudens occasione urbanitatis, increpuit: *Λογοςῶρητος ἐστὶν Κανίνιος κόνσουλ;* et deinde, *Hoc consecutus est Rebilus, ut quaereretur, quibus consulibus consul fuerit.* Dicere praeterea non destitit: *Vigilantem habemus consulem Caninium, qui in consulatu suo somnum non vidit.*

MACROBIUS, *Sat.* vii. 3. 10

Sunt alia scommata minus aspera, quasi edentatae beluae morsus, ut Tullius in consulem qui uno tantum die consulatum peregit: *Solent, inquit, esse flamines diales, modo consules diales habemus;* et in eundem, *Vigilantissimus est consul noster, qui in consulatu suo somnum non vidit.*

TREBELLIUS POLLIO *Tyr.*

*Trig.* 8.2

Ut ille consul qui sex meridianis horis consulatum suffectum tenuit, a Marco Tullio tali aspersus est ioco: *Consulem habuimus tam seuerum tamque censorium, ut in eius magistratu nemo pranderit, nemo cenaverit, nemo dormiverit,* de hoc (Mario) etiam dici posse videatur, qui una die factus est imperator, alia die visus est imperare, tertia interemptus est.

Cicero in the letter utters two quips at the expense of Caninius, while Macrobius credits him with four, quoting one of these a second time in a slightly different form. The letter, addressed to Manius Curius, was written at Rome in the first days of 44 B. C., soon after the event; hence the jokes are thrown into past time, and are entirely consistent with the facts. Caninius became consul at the beginning of the seventh hour, that is at noon, on the last day of December; he would then have had six hours of office in the working day, which ended at sunset. The language of Cicero, however, implies that he had in mind not the working day but the civil day, which ended at midnight; before sunrise of January 1 the new consuls would be out under the open sky consulting the auspices. He could then with perfect accuracy say that in Caninius' consulship nobody breakfasted; but nothing could be more clumsy than the turn given to the joke by Trebellius, who throws the six hours of office into the middle of the day (unless we emend *meridianis* to *promeridianis*), and does away with the afternoon meal as well as that of the morning. Trebellius, moreover, misses the point scored by Cicero in *mirifica vigilantia* . . . *viderit*, which suggests that Caninius kept himself awake till midnight; Trebellius, making Caninius' tenure of office last from nine o'clock in the morning till three in the afternoon, would have it that "no one slept," though the consul might rather be expected to remain on the watch while the people were sleeping. If Trebellius had had Cicero's language distinctly in mind he could hardly have so perverted the meaning; yet it is probable that his version is in last analysis only a blending of the two quips which we find in the letter to Curius.

The Ciceronian jokes quoted by Macrobius seem to have been taken from the collection to which he refers;<sup>1</sup> had he used the letter to Curius it is not likely that he would have failed to repeat the quip about no breakfasting in Caninius' consulship in connection with the other, twice mentioned, about that consul's watchfulness. In the language of the letter, again, there is nothing to suggest the words of Macrobius, (*Cicero*) *dicere non destitit*; and the substitution of an adjective for the more forceful *mirifica vigilantia* of the letter confirms the supposition that Macrobius was using another source. Probably one or both the jests recorded in the letter were launched also in conversation and became current; in this way at least one of them drifted into the collection drawn upon by Macrobius. The form of the jest in Dio's *Roman History* (xliii. 46) more

<sup>1</sup> *Sat.* ii. 1. 12: "Cicero autem quantum in ea re valuerit quis ignorat, qui vel liberti eius libros quos is de iocis patroni composuit, quos quidam ipsius putant esse, legere curavit?"

nearly resembles that of the letter, and may have been taken from it: "Cicero said that the consul displayed so great vigilance in his consulship that he did not give himself even a wink of sleep."

Trebellius may have taken his version as it stands from some earlier writer; this is, however, improbable because at the close of the *Tyranni triginta* he tells us that this work was not written but hurriedly dictated. When dictating he had before him letters, and probably also memoranda, which he freely used; in citing a literary or historical parallel, he would hardly have taken the time to look up a reference, but would have relied wholly on his memory. The principal elements of his version are found in Cicero's letter; the explanation on the whole freest from difficulty is that Trebellius' language represents a confused recollection, perhaps a school reminiscence. Forgetting the name of the consul, when dictating he put the quips of the letter together into a rhetorical form, so twisting them as to do violence to the original meaning, and thus admitted an error which he would have escaped if he had taken the time to hunt up and verify his reference. But the ancient historians were in general less critical in the use of sources than are those of modern times; and besides, in all ages jokes have been treated as common property. Caninius is known to the reader of Caesar's *Commentaries* as a trusted officer; and it is by no means certain that all the jokes upon his consulship which have been credited to Cicero are authentic.

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